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Mapping Frankfurt *c.* 1350: Baldemar of Petterweil's Recording of Space in Medieval Urban-Ecclesiastical Sources

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One of the leading questions this collection asks is how to read late medieval representations of space with modern eyes. I offer one answer by reading, with 21st-century eyes, Canon Baldemar of Petterweil's 14th-century description of Frankfurt/Main onto a 17th-century map. Baldemar's text is not a map, but seems quite familiar, which might make it even more difficult to handle than an unfamiliar spatial description.[1] After providing context for Baldemar's textual mapping, I turn to his attempt (*c.* 1350) to control space by describing it systematically and topographically.

[1] A discussion of Kevin Lynch's *Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960) and its historical depths cannot be achieved here, although it is tempting, considering the comparable images produced by Baldemar and Lynch.

We begin with a glance at the late medieval town of Frankfurt and its development from a pre-modern to a modern layout. Frankfurt was positioned in a fortunate spot, with access to the main important travel routes of the Holy Roman Empire and beyond. The city grew out of an 8th-century royal palace (*palatium*) on a ford across the Main, one of the important German rivers and an eastern tributary of the Rhine. The kings and princes of the empire visited frequently, but intermittently (it was the legal site for royal elections from at least the mid-13th century). Due to its location, it hosted successful biannual trade fairs with visitors from all over Europe.[2]

By the mid-14th century, Frankfurt had developed into an economically and politically central town. It boasted a bridge over the Main River and had seen at least two phases of wall extensions. As was usual for the time, the walls excluded and so protected the town from the river, whose ford had been replaced by a stone bridge towards Sachsenhausen, the bridgehead opposite

[2] On the fairs, see M. Rothmann, *Die Frankfurter Messen im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Steiner 1998). On Frankfurt, see *Frankfurt am Main. Die Geschichte der Stadt in neun Beiträgen* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1991). A new overview volume is forthcoming. Cf. F. Schmieder, *Frankfurt am Main im Mittelalter. Bürger zwischen König, Kirche und Rat*, Ms. 2003. A digital version is being prepared for open access publication and can be acquired from me. For a very brief article in English, see F. Schmieder, "Frankfurt," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Robert E. Bjork (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010), vol. II, 666-667.

Frankfurt. The gates and roads leading towards them were particularly adapted to defensive purposes, but also designed for economic, political, and social accessibility. The last wall was in the process of construction but not yet finished. Nevertheless, the basic layout of the late medieval and early modern town seems to have been in place by Baldemar's time.

We have no medieval plan of Frankfurt,[3] but there are a relatively vague one from *c*.1552 and then Matthäus Merian's from 1628 **(Figure 1)**.[4] The latter is usually the basis for modern plans of historical Frankfurt.[5] The town's physical structure and layout were not fundamentally altered until the 17th century, so the Merian plan is a good tool for bridging the gap between 21st -and 14th -century Frankfurters' spatial visualizations. Thus, I acknowledge that, as a modern person, I need a graphic map to help me conceptualize Baldemar's text and in

[3] Medieval city maps are rare beyond maps of Rome, Jerusalem, Constantinople, and a few other important places.

[4] The so-called "Faberscher Belagerungsplan," a plan of the town and urban hinterland by Konrad Faber at the time the town was besieged in 1552. See F. Berger, S. Hynek, P. Maresch, M. Rothmann, and F. Schmieder, *Frankfurt und Umgebung auf historischen Karten* (forthcoming Frankfurt am Main: Societät, 2020), 23-24; J. van Putten, *Networked Nation: Mapping German Cities in Sebastian Münster's Cosmographia* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 104-117.

[5] Such as the plan by F. Schwind, "Frankfurt vom frühen Mittelalter bis zur Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts," in *Geschichtlicher Atlas von Hessen* Lfrg. 12, 3 1978 = https://www.lagis-hessen.de/de/subjects/gsrec/current/1/sn/ga?q=frankfurt.

order to come as close as possible to the medieval town I have chosen Merian's plan.

Frankfurt was flourishing in the mid-14th century, but the consequences of the climate crisis of that epoch affected it like most other European towns, bringing famine, flood, plague, flagellants, and a pogrom against the Jews.[6] During the pogrom, which the council that collected most of the taxes from the Jews tried to stop, fire broke out and destroyed part of St. Bartholomew's chapter church, which was close to the Jewish quarter and the only parochial church in town (see below).

Both the secular and ecclesiastical authorities reacted to the crisis like other large towns of the Holy Roman Empire—by increasing administrative writing. We do not know whether the chapter of St. Bartholomew or the urban council originated the idea of chronicling events in order to overcome the general crisis. Both did, however, and produced considerably more in writing in the following two to three years than before. The council faced immediate economic,

[6] In particular, the 22 July 1342 St. Magdalene flood that set most of the old city center under water and crashed the bridge over the Main River, an essential link in the trade routes through Frankfurt. On that flood, see M. Bauch, "Die Magdalenenflut 1342—ein unterschätztes Jahrtausendereignis?" at https://mittelalter.hypotheses.org/3016.

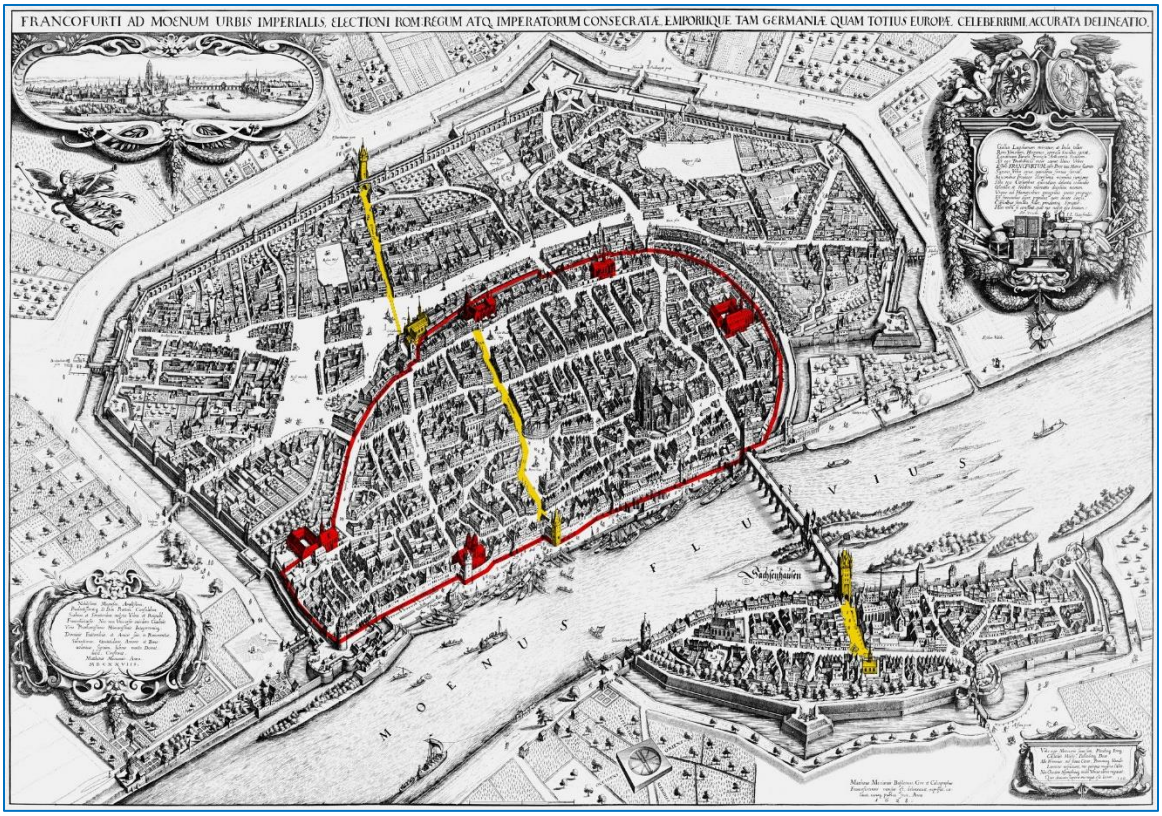


Figure 1 Merian plan of Frankfurt am Main, 1628. Photo: graphic design by Mike Glüsing.

social, and security problems and established itself more and more as a ruling authority (*Obrigkeit*), as rulers of the citizens rather than as the citizens' deputies. A struggle started in earnest for the city to acquire as many privileges, rights, and legal instruments as possible. From 1372 onwards, we speak of Frankfurt as an imperial city rather than a royal city, which means that the rights the king had

as lord of the town were in urban hands. The stock-taking after this crisis impelled the council to systematically tax church property.[7]

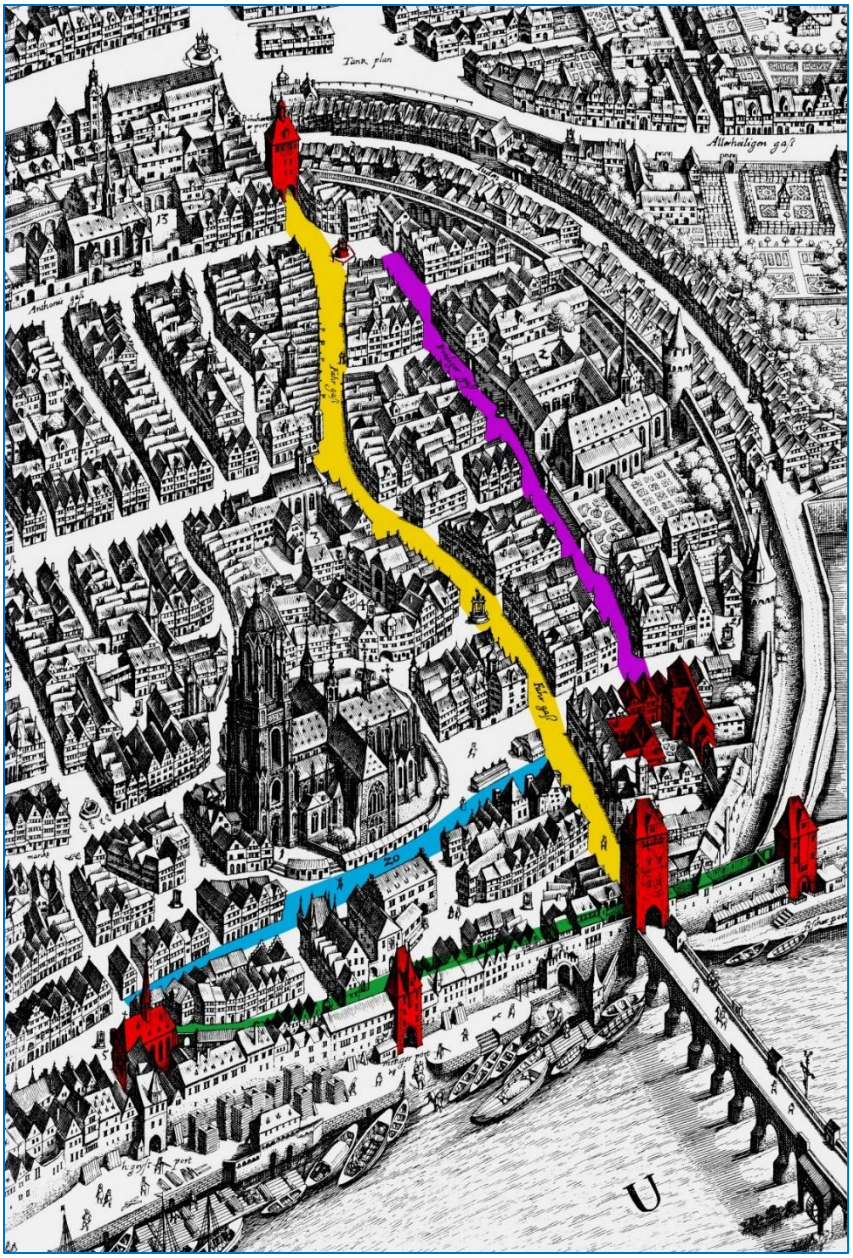
The chapter of St. Bartholomew, in contrast, had different immediate problems to solve. As we have seen, the church was damaged by fire and the nearby Jewish houses—mostly built on ecclesiastical real estate—also burned down, but, more importantly in the long run, their tenants were either killed or ousted from town. These events seemingly prompted a systematically recorded overview of citizens' possessions and incomes; in short, a new *Liber Censuum* was created.[8] This would require registering every parcel of land in every corner of a town where St. Bartholomew's had been the main ecclesiastical institution for more than 500 years, during which time it had collected donations of all sorts, but especially real estate. The job was assigned to Canon Baldemar of Petterweil, who was probably from a burgher or even a patrician family.[9]

[7] On these developments, see Schmieder, *Frankfurt am Main*; F. Schmieder, "*Des gedencke der rat, ob sie eynis malis der stad bedorfften*! Geistliche Bürger, Ausbürger, Beisassen als besondere Gruppen in der spätmittelalterlichen Stadt Frankfurt am Main" in *Sondergemeinden und Sonderbezirke in der Stadt der Vormoderne*, ed. P. Johanek (Köln: Boehlau, 2004), 125-163; also F. Schmieder, "'Wider die geistlichen Freiheiten' – für die Herrschaft des Rates. Das Ringen um die Kontrolle der Pfarrseelsorge in Frankfurt am Main im 15. Jahrhundert" in *Die Pfarre in der Stadt. Siedlungskern=Bürgerkirche – Urbanes Zentrum*, ed. W. Freitag (Köln: Boehlau, 2011), 63-75.
[8] Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, Bartholomäusstift Bücher I/19 (1350).
[9] Contemporary sources do not provide the answer to questions regarding his class.

As a means to a very specific end,[10] Baldemar created the *Liber Censuum* as the basis for stock-taking: it lists all of the lanes and alleys, squares and passages of the town. He organized this list spatially and two-dimensionally—in a way that suggests to the modern reader that only his map of Frankfurt is missing. There is, however, no indication whatsoever that Baldemar felt the need of a map or that he ever added a drawn plan to the *Liber*. In what follows, I present only the beginning of Baldemar's rather long list, in order to give the reader a valid impression of it. As noted above, I have substituted Matthäus Merian's 1628 map of Frankfurt for the map that *seems* missing to the 21st-century viewer and do so to help us imagine the space that Baldemar recorded.

After a few preliminary but important systematic definitions, to which I will return, Baldemar starts with an overview. We can retrace his description in **Figure 1**. There the 13th-century wall of the old town of Frankfurt is marked in red. Baldemar starts in the east and moves clockwise, using ecclesiastical

[10] This is not clear from the editions and translations published in Frankfurt. It was edited under the title of *Chorographia* without the introductory theory that will be discussed below and without the following *Liber Censuum*. See L. H. Euler, ed., "Des Canonicus Baldemar von Petterweil Beschreibung der kaiserlichen Stadt Frankfurt am Main aus dem 14. Jahrhundert," *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte und Altertumskunde Frankfurt aM* 1 (1858): 51-110; H. von Nathusius-Neinstedt, "Baldemars von Petterweil Beschreibung von Frankfurt am Main," *Archiv für Frankfurts Geschichte und Kunst* 3. Folge 5 (1896): 1-54.



landmarks—built in stone and thus durable, with symbolic protective value. Like the city walls, these buildings are marked in red on Merian's map.

Figure 2 Cutout from the Merian plan of Frankfurt am Main, 1628. Photo: graphic design by Mike Glüsing.

Frankinford imperialis est urbs atque tripartite	Frankfurt is an imperial town consisting of three parts.
Prima pars, antiquum opidum, maedia, his limitibus videlicet ecclesia Predicatorum, Sancti Georgii, Pentinetium, Montis Marie, sancti Anthonii interclusa.	The first part, the old town, in the middle, is enclosed by the following borders: the church of the Dominicans, St. George, the Penitentials, St. Mary on the hill, St. Anthony.
Secunda pars novum oppidum, a parte septemtrionali et sinistra versus campum.	The second part is the new city, to the north and left [of the old town] towards the fields.
Tertia pars Sassinhusen a parte meridionali atque dextra ultra Mogum site.	The third part is Sachsenhausen, towards the south and the right, across the Main River.

Baldemar uses mostly generic names two sections of the town, "old" (*antiquum*) and "new" (*novum*) but distinguishes the third section with the proper name Sassinhusen, or "Houses of the Saxons."[11] Two other statements here are particularly interesting. Looking at the Merian plan, we see that Baldemar's use of "to the … left" (*sinistra*) and "towards the … right" (*dextra*) seem to come from

[11] Old and new town and Sachsenhausen, which officially became part of Frankfurt after 1372.

the standpoint of an observer. These terms also demonstrate that Baldemar oriented his description to the north, as if doing so was natural. There was no such cartographical standard in his time.

Baldemar goes on to more finely subdivide sections of the town, but this time his division is purely topographic. It might correspond to social and administrative organizations for fire, defense, etc., although there is no such information in pre-15th-century sources. In **Figure 1**, the lanes bisecting the three parts of Frankfurt are marked in yellow, as are their end points—with one exception: where the starting point is identical with one of the landmarks, the church of St. Mary on the hill.

Antiqui opidi partes per vicum a porta eiusdem et Mogi dicta Farporte ad ecclesiam Montis Marie prenotatam,	The parts of the old town are separated by the lane from the gate called Farporte (that leads from the old town to the Main) to the church of St. Mary on the hill named above,
Novi opidi partes per vicum dictum Eschersheymer gaze a claustro sancta Katharine ad portam dictam	The parts of the new town are separated by the lane called Eschersheimer Gasse from the

Eschersheymer porte novi opidi memorati.	monastery of St. Catherine to the gate called Eschersheimer Port …
Sassinhusen partes per visum ab ecclesia Sancte Elyzabeth ad portam pontis [distinguuntur],	The parts of Sachsenhausen are separated by the view from St. Elizabeth church to the bridge gate,
a meridie ad septemtrionem tendentes dicti dividentes.	and the mentioned divisions [all] stretch from south to north.

With this last remark and the directions he gives, Baldemar moves beyond a simple list and places the "divisions" in two-dimensional space (the kind of additional information he also provides later in the course of his description). Since this would have been unnecessary if he had looked at a sketch, this might be another sign that he had neither a sketch nor even considered drawing one. He then starts with the main lanes of the old town. **Figure 2** shows the eastern part of the old town, with gates, ecclesiastical sites, and one well in red, which Baldemar again used as the lanes' endpoints.

Antiqui opidi superioris partis vici principales	The main lanes in the upper part of the old town[:]
Predicatorum (dictam olim Stegeburnen gaze), proximus orienti,	The Dominicans' lane (once called the alley of the Stege well) at the a

curia Arnsburg ad puteum dictum Rodin burnen,	[the monks of] Arnsburg to the well called the Red Well [in violet]
Fabrorum seu Fargazze a porta pontis Mogi ad portam dictam Burnheymer dor opidi supradicti.	The smiths' lane or Fargasse from the gate at the Main bridge to the easternmost rim from the close of aforementioned gate "Bornheimer Gate" of the old town [in yellow] Both stretch from south to north.
Ambo a meridei ad septemtrionem sunt protensi.	Both at the southernmost edge [of the old town].
Piscatorum a porta eorundem et Mogi ad portam Carnificum et Mogi	The fishers' lane from their gate to the Main ["fischer port" on the plan] to the gate of the butchers and the Main [in green; see the German name "metzger port" on the plan]
Carnificum a porta eorundem et Mogi ad hospitale Sancti Spiritus.	The butchers' lane from their gate to the Main to the hospital of the Holy Ghost. [prolongation of the green mark].

Ambo proximi meridiei.	Both at the southernmost edge [of the old town].
Judeorum a vico Fabrorum et acie respieciente orientem et meridiem cemeterii Ecclesie sancti Bartholomei ibidem ad hospitale prenotatum sancti Bartholomei ibidem ad hospitale prenotatum	The Jews' lane from the smiths' lane and the southeast corner of the graveyard of the church of St. Bartholomew here and the hospital mentioned above [in blue]

Again, the "easternmost" and "southernmost" town edges are spatial specifications that would have been unnecessary if a map had accompanied Baldemar's text. The Jews' lane is the aforementioned location of the Jewish houses that burned down in 1348. The Jews who settled in Frankfurt some years after the pogrom were relocated in the 15th century to an enclosed alley on the edge of town, visible in **Figure 2** on the upper right (in its very much changed, 17th-century condition). This is one of the few major changes in the town's structure between Baldemar's and Merian's times.

Baldemar, of course, knew only the topography of his time. And his localization, at "the southeast corner of the graveyard of Saint Bartholomew," is

a significant part of his creating a "map in words only." This becomes clearer when we return to Baldemar's definitions of his terminology at the beginning of the work. Among those definitions is his solution to the problem of how to describe every house, every garden, and every feature in every lane, alley, and square in a systematic, comprehensible way:

Latera vicorum que a parte celi ad dorsum eorum	The sides of the lanes [are described] by the cardinal directions behind them,
acies laterum que a duabus partibus celi ad faciem.	the corners by the two compass directions they face.

Baldemar, in his own words, seems to take the lanes as locational references, but, in fact, his reference system is somewhat inconsistent. (For an attempt to draw it, see **Figure 3**). The house *in* the lane is seen *from* the lane: It is on the east side of the lane and is not described by the direction in which it faces. The house at the crossing, on the other hand, is described by the direction in which it faces. Thus, the house is not seen from the crossing, in which case it would be at the southeastern corner in my drawing; rather, the reference is the

block of which the house is a part. This becomes clear when we examine the relationship of Jewish Lane to the corner of St. Bartholomew's graveyard, which faces the south and east, but is on the northern side of the lane.

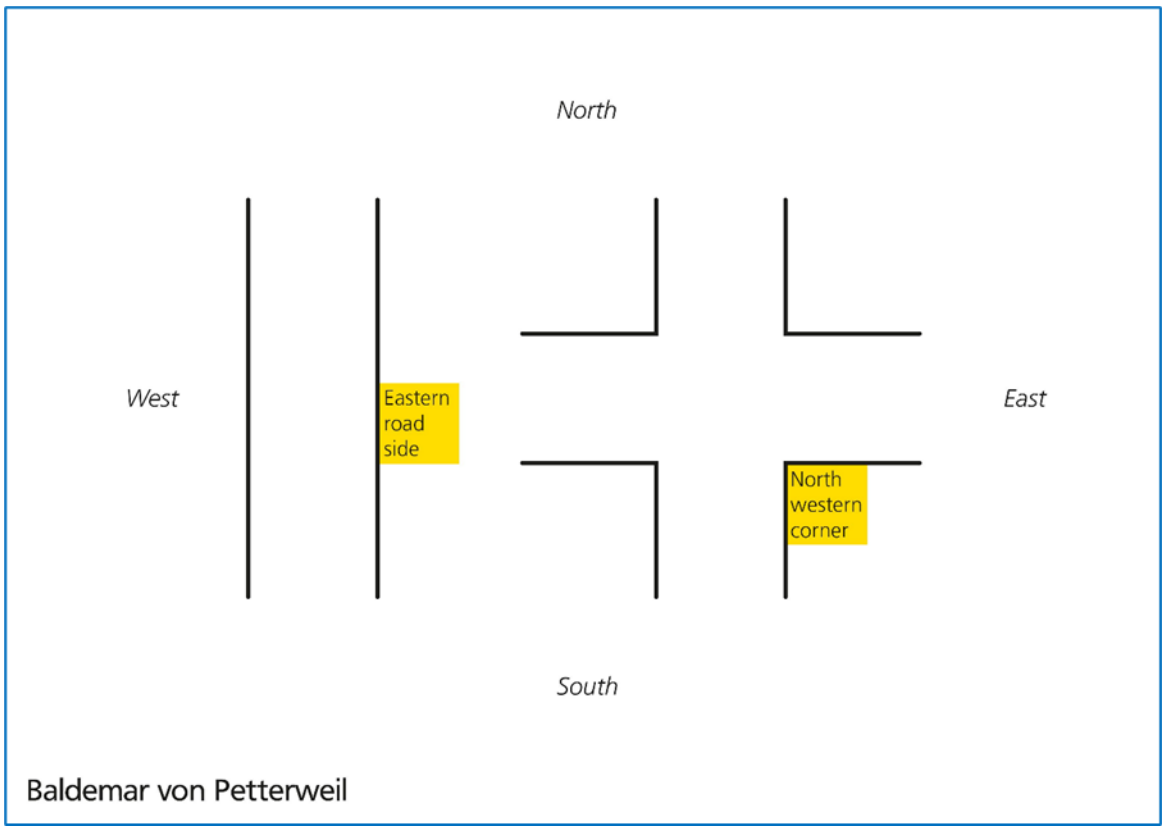


Figure 3 Baldemar of Petterweil's system of describing the localization of a house. Photo: graphic design by Mike Glüsing.

The combination of two different, even oppositional, reference modes produce an awkward attempt to describe something that today we see as quite normal: if people commonly referred to houses by their names, all the

inhabitants of the town would have to know all of those locational names. Does Baldemar's method simply convey a way different from ours of indicating places in towns—or does it show that there was no common system in his time and that he did his best to create one?

Although it is not easy to find comparable examples, current studies help bring us closer to a solution, even though they deal with much larger Mediterranean towns.[12] Daniel Lord Smail's *Imaginary Cartographies* draws particularly from notary instruments dealing with landed property in mid-14th-century Marseille, along with those notaries' mental maps of the town.[13] Nicholas Eckstein's work on the 1427 Florentine Catasto system is also useful here.[14] As Eckstein explains, the Florentines created a taxation system—similar to what Baldemar had done, but more than two generations later—a census demanding a description of taxable property from all households. These descriptions

[12] I thank the other participants in the expert meeting for these suggestions. Marseille had an estimated 25,000 inhabitants in late 13th century and Florence about 100,000 in the 14th century, while Frankfurt has been estimated to have had 8,000-10,000 inhabitants in the late 14th century. Plus, the Mediterranean is rightly considered "advanced," particularly in terms of the culture of public writing and administration.

[13] D. Lord Smail, *Imaginary Cartographies: Possession and Identity in Late Medieval Marseille* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

[14] N. A. Eckstein, "Prepositional City: Spatial Practice and Micro-Neighborhood in Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly* 71 (2018): 1235-1271.

(notarized and thus probably standardized by the notaries to some degree) listed properties a person claimed to own and located them by naming the parish in which they were located, along with the adjoining houses, plots, and alleys.

The Catasto had "one obvious effect ... [,] to map Florence as the sum of its tax assessable households."[15] This result came from a "spatial practice" and was neither formulated nor systematically conceptualized as an input to the census.[16] In both cases, the systematic aspects have been brought to light by modern scholars like Smail and Eckstein, who (re)constructed mental maps from words, from descriptions of spatial entities and connections, medieval mental "maps informed by cartographic lexicon and cartographic grammars."[17] Unlike Lord Smail's protagonists, Baldemar did reflect the cartography that informed the taxation system, while acting as a cleric covering some of what notaries did later in Frankfurt, where a public notariate had not yet been introduced and people relied heavily on clerical expertise. He not only let his mental map speak through his description but he created a well-considered cartographic system.[18]

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[15] Eckstein, "Prepositional City," 1241. The Florentine *catasto* stems ultimately from the Latin *caput* (head) and leads to the modern cadastre (French and English) and *Kataster* (German).
[16] Eckstein, "Prepositional City," 1265.
[17] Lord Smail, *Imaginary Cartographies*, xi.
[18] Lord Smail, *Imaginary Cartographies*, 67.

Baldemar certainly seems to have been convincing; he created his system for his own ecclesiastical community. He then created, based on this system, a book of ecclesiastical urban income at the request of the urban council. Considering how contested the taxation of ecclesiastical income was between the civil and ecclesiastical powers, this can be taken as interesting proof that his was a unique, innovative, and easily-used technique for controlling space.[19] Maybe the council—like many contemporary, secular entities north of the Alps that were less used to administrative literacy—aspired to some equality of weapons and would, as it often did, turned to clerical expertise in controlling space as it attempted to control clerics and their spaces.

Whether Baldemar's system, the first step of the rich *Libri Censuum* tradition in Frankfurt, was actually and consistently used remains to be checked.[20] His is quite an unusually organized description of space as a way to

[19] There are at least two books in Baldemar's hand the urban council instituted to control ecclesiastical income, for the "Fabrik" of the church (which was controlled by clerics and councilors alike) and of the clerical interest in the town (it is unclear whether this is actually complete): Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, *Bartholomäusstift Städtische Bücher* 45 (after 1358), 62 (probably between 1355 and 1360).

[20] Several more books registering diverse income of the church and its members in Baldemar's hand are preserved among the books of the chapter church of Saint Bartholomew. See Institut für Stadtgeschichte Frankfurt am Main, *Bartholomäusstift Bücher* IV/ 14 B (1355); BB IV/ 14 C (1356), V/ 43 (1360), BB IV/ 14 A. A dissertation is planned on this and will hopefully bring more insight.

assess clerical properties: it was neither specifying sacred nor profaned spaces, although most of the landmarks that organized the description were churches. In Baldemar's system, we see an appropriation of space by measuring and cognitively mapping it. Organizing and controlling space in late medieval towns became more and more a tool of power. Baldemar does not seem to have needed a drawn map, which raises a question that has interested me for some time: When and why do people start to become accustomed to maps? ❧

Baldemar might have been trustworthy because he was the son of a burgher, but that alone would never have sufficed.